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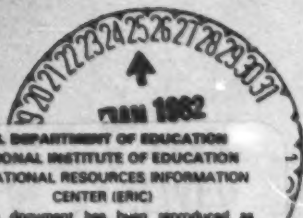
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ABSTRACT

To identify promising practices, issues, and problems concerning education for the gifted in Maine, 239 classroom teachers and 14 administrators from 11 school districts geographically distributed throughout the state responded to questionnaires which profiled teacher personal characteristics and styles, described the educational setting and resources, and characterized the 112 gifted children being served. All participating districts were small and rural and had established gifted programs within the last 3 years, with 9 of the programs being primarily the Renzuli Enrichment Triad Model. Identified as problems were: lack of institutional preparation (support services and administrative inertia), lack of definition of gifted/talented consultant and classroom teacher roles, lack of data on effectiveness of alternative program models, implementation in small rural areas, and funding. Findings indicated gifted program funding had quadrupled and the number of programs had doubled in the past 2 years, and, where gifted students were served effectively, it was due to an innovative and creative teacher/program facilitator who was devoted to the educational process for all students. Conclusions revealed that if teachers and administrators are the key to successful programs for gifted students, teacher training programs must initiate change at all levels for all schools, teachers, and students. Questionnaire results are included. (NEC)

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Problems in Implementing Gifted/Talented Programs in 11 Rural Maine Schools

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A survey of 11 school districts geographically distributed throughout Maine was conducted during the 1980-81 school year. Four questionnaires were developed in cooperation with Ms. Pat O'Connell, Consultant for Gifted/Talented Education, Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Services. The questionnaires were designed to elicit some clearer impressions about the "state of the art" in the education of the gifted in Maine in order to counterbalance some of the distortions, wishful thinking, overblown claims, and misdirected evangelism that has plagued the field. My intention is to identify any promising practices and any issues and problems. A second part, not completed, will be to determine principles that can guide schools in setting up educational programs for developing the potential of gifted children in rural areas.

Introduction

Maine, with its more than 155 districts (districts include 33 cities and towns, 74 School Administrative Districts, 25 Unions of towns, and 13 Community School Districts) covering 33,215 square miles and enrolling approximately 218,000 students, has an educational system that is entirely rural. It is unique in that all but one of these districts can be classified as "small" by national standards. The national standard defines "small" as a school district with only one high school. Although Portland, Maine's largest city, is the district with two high schools in it, it is still considered "rural" in size by federal definition. Other statistics which emphasize Maine's uniqueness are: 91% of the schools have an average daily attendance (ADA) of fewer than 3,000 students; 21% have an ADA of fewer than 600; and the smallest district has only 57 students.

Eleven school districts, not including the largest or the smallest, participated in the survey. They all had established gifted programs within the last three years. Nine of the programs were primarily the Renoulli Enrichment Triad Model. Of these nine programs, two had a "resource room"

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connected with the program. The others were either entirely "up to the teacher" to provide the program after a few initial workshops or had a "consulting teacher/director" who helped to facilitate the classroom aspect. Two programs were separate "pull-out" programs.

Respondents

Respondents included 239 classroom teachers who have been given a primary responsibility for identifying and serving gifted children and 14 administrators. Administrators included seven building principals, one superintendent and six consulting teacher/directors of gifted programs. This questionnaire gave a profile of personal characteristics and teacher/administrator behaviors or styles. A second questionnaire about the "setting" where the programs are taking place was answered by 125 persons. The "setting" questionnaire included such items as: availability of resource persons, browsing libraries, artistic performances, exhibitions, films, filmstrips, video tapes, television, slides, field trips; attitudes within the schools towards "extras," and the number of interest centers, teacher training activities, and materials available for children and teachers. A third questionnaire answered questions about 112 children who had been identified and were being served by gifted programs. The person who had the primary responsibility for the child's program--either the classroom teacher or the consulting teacher/director or resource room teacher--filled in this questionnaire.

Release time during a teacher workshop or faculty meeting was set aside to allow the respondents to answer the questions. Either I or my student assistant was present to clarify questions.

Results

Teacher Background (N=239). Since most of the gifted children will probably spend most of their time in a regular classroom, it is essential that all teachers have the educational and experiential background as well as the commitment to meet the needs of gifted students.

Contemporary literature is abound with studies of the kinds of teachers and teacher behavior that can best provide for the optimum development of the gifted child.

I have taken a synthesis of traits compiled by Milton J. Gold (1965) and C.J. Maker (1975) of what is known about the personal characteristics

and teaching behaviors of successful teachers of gifted/talented children and developed the questionnaire.

An outline of these personal characteristics and teaching behaviors is as follows:

Personal Characteristics

- Understands, accepts, respects, trusts, and likes self; has outstanding ego strength
- Is sensitive to others, less concerned with self; supports, respects, trusts others
- Is above average intellectually; exhibits an intellectual style of conceptualizing, generalizing, creating, initiating, relating, organizing, imagining
- Is flexible, open to new ideas
- Has intellectual interests, literary and cultural
- Desires to learn, increase knowledge; has high achievement needs
- Is enthusiastic
- Is intuitive, perceptive
- Is committed to excellence
- Feels responsible for own behavior and consequences

Teaching Behaviors

- Develops a flexible, individualized program
- Creates a warm, safe, and permissive atmosphere
- Provides feedback
- Uses varied strategies
- Respects personal self-images and enhances positive ones; respects personal values
- Respects creativity and imagination
- Stimulates higher-order mental processes
- Respects individuality and personal integrity.

A composite of the 239 Maine teachers of gifted children reveals the following::

Personal characteristics

Age--70% are between the ages of 26 and 40

Education--63% have a BA or BS degree

- 17% have a MA or MS degree
- 2% have a masters plus additional credits
- 6% have a BA or BS plus additional credits
- 12% do not have a BA or BS degree

Majors included:

- 56% elementary education
- 9% English
- 5% special education
- 5% each in science and math
- 4% psychology
- 4% history
- 1% or less in art/music, PE, business education, reading, French, sociology, etc.

Minors included:

- 20% didn't list one
- 20% science/social studies
- 16% English

- 9% elementary education
- 6% history
- 5% sociology
- 5% psychology
- 1% or less in French, math, music/art, biology, special education, geology, early childhood, humanities, philosophy, theology, government, urban education, language, liberal arts

Interests (can list more than one interest)

- 56% sports
- 46% reading
- 29% sewing/knitting
- 29% crafts
- 15% gardening/plants
- 14% music
- 12% art/painting/graphics
- 10% cooking
- 6% dance/dramatic arts
- 5% fishing/hunting
- 4% travel
- 3% each creative writing, stamps, history
- 2% motorcycles/car maintenance
- 1% each antiques, coins, horses, boating, local politics, exercise, animals, miniatures/models, singing, weaving, pottery, guns, sleep, money, women, puppetry, aquariums, Hummels, TV, poetry, model railroad, refinishing furniture, language, walking, photography, architecture, "lots"

Travel (can be more than one entry per respondent)

- 34% Canada
- 34% Florida/East Coast
- 33% Europe
- 20% not applicable
- 8% New England
- 8% D.C./Virginia
- 8% Mid-west
- 7% West
- 7% Bermuda/Bahama/Caribbean
- 7% SE Asia/Viet Nam
- 3% New York City
- 3% extensively and frequently
- 1% or less Mexico, Britain, South America, Middle East, Hawaii, Africa, Australia/New Zealand, Japan/Philippines, Iceland, Central America, Alaska, Maine, USSR, Rumania, 38 states

Grade level taught: (87% of teachers k-8)

- 88% teach k-6
- 6% teach 7 or 8
- 1% or less teach science, language arts, social studies, home economics, math, preschool, K-12 combined, 7/8 literature

Was school enjoyable?

- 91% responded yes
- 7% " no
- 2% said bored, so-so or not applicable

Preservice Experiences with Gifted/Talented Education?

- 38% no
- 28% yes
- 14% not applicable (can be interpreted as no)

Of the 28% yes replies, 10% had a college course. The others responded with conference, one-day workshop, mini-grant, "one", inservice as a student teacher, not specified

Inservice experiences

- 52% yes
- 19% no
- 29% not applicable (can be interpreted as none?)

Of the 52% positive responses, it was indicated that:

- 25% course/present course
- 19% workshops
- 1% or less said 30 hours, 4 hours, 45 hours, one, three, mini-grant, discussion to instigate program, in classroom, very little, some, one or two, recertification, numerous, explanation of program.

Workshops (number of hours) for the 19% who responded positively

- 44% 1-10 hours
- 10% 11-20 hours
- 9% 41-50 hours
- 8% 70-100 hours
- 8% 21-30 hours
- others responded not applicable, not specified, 3 credits

University Course

- 13% yes
- 79% n/a
- 8% none

Recertification

- 34% yes
- 66% no or n/a

Topics covered (can list more than one topic)

- 55% n/a
- 27% Identification/selection
- 15% program implementation
- 10% definition/characteristics
- 7% materials
- 3% each Renzulli, testing, evaluation, G/T, develop exercises, materials, enrichment, parental involvement
- 1% or less screening, develop a unit/curriculum, compacting math, underachieving gifted, creative training, first aid, types of programs, needs of gifted

Perception of their/needs to have a successful gifted program

- 52% organizational skills/materials
- 42% classroom management
- 37% methods
- 32% Identification
- 31% individualization
- 11% extensive indepth knowledge
- 10% n/a
- 7% time

To obtain more training/support, where would you go?

- 40% University
- 37% Principal
- 29% other
- 18% State Department
- 17% Director of Special Education
- 7% n/a
- 1% superintendent

Did you have an adequate role in identifying the gifted?

- 39% n/a
- 31% no
- 30% yes
 - of the positive responses:
 - 17% testing
 - 10% observation
 - 10% input asked
 - 7% sat on PET
 - 5% sample reposts

Type of child identified

- 31% high IQ/high motivation/high creativity
- 22% high IQ/high motivation
- 18% high IQ/low motivation
- 10% high creativity/high motivation
- 8% high creativity/low motivation
- 10% high IQ/high creativity

Should there be a separate program for the gifted/talented?

- 62% yes
- 25% no
- 12% n/a

Should each teacher do his own thing?

- 40% yes
- 29% n/a
- 26% no

Total rank order weighted (large number is highest priority)

more time for teachers to work with individual students	461
more time for cooperation/planning	441
more resource materials for teachers	373
reduced sizes of classes	360
decreased teaching load	326
direction from teacher preparing institutions	231
more stimulation/leadership from central office	173
more supervisory personal	146
more stimulation/leadership from state department	115
more special teachers and/or guidance	66
support from community and school board	31
Identification, program	26
survey assessment of mentors	15
link G/T with talent in community	
special classes for G/T	

The question arises: Do the kinds of experiences and background Maine teachers have facilitate the development of intellectual skills needed to work with the gifted? Is a "major" in education broad enough to contribute to the personal and professional characteristics, knowledge and skills essential for teachers who have gifted students in their class? Are there opportunities to develop these skills?

Teaching Behaviors

The sample of Maine teachers was asked to circle the words that best described the philosophy or climate of their classrooms.

The results are as follows:

- 65% busy
- 65% structured
- 63% flexible
- 59% academic
- 52% individualized
- 51% sensitive
- 48% performance oriented
- 49% spontaneous
- 47% skill oriented
- 47% motivated
- 41% creative
- 40% innovative
- 37% remedial
- 35% traditional
- 33% adaptive
- 26% conceptual
- 23% divergent
- 22% aesthetic
- 17% convergent
- 16% programmed
- 14% open
- 14% talented
- 10% "by the book"
- 10% chaotic
- 9% disadvantaged
- 8% gifted
- 6% laissez-faire

The range of characteristics may be viewed in three tiers. First of all, a successful teacher of gifted is a successful teacher of all. In addition, he/she must possess those characteristics known to be important in working with the gifted and finally, he/she needs the specific competencies related to that type of gifted program offered by the school. Thus, the key to producing teachers with the characteristics/behaviors desired lies in our teachers colleges and inservice courses.

Administrators (N=14). This group was sampled as they often carry the most weight in the decision-making process. Seven building principals, one superintendent and six consulting teacher/directors served as respondents.

What training have you had in Gifted education?

- 57% none
- 14% very little
- 14% inservice workshops
- 14% personal reading/summers at UConn

Are field trips available to all your students?

- 71% yes
- 29% no

How many trips per year?

- n/a--3
- at least one--3
- k-3, 3 trips; 4-6, 1 trip--1
- 4-6, 3 trips--1
- 4-6, 0-5 trips--1
- k-3, one trip--1
- 4-6, one trip--1

66% of the administrators saw this as easily available.

Is there time set aside for regular classroom teachers to participate in gifted/talented workshops?

- 70% yes
- 30% no

Is there time set aside for regular classroom teachers to consult with project directors?

- 70% yes
- 30% no

Overall, do you feel the program adequately serves gifted/talented students?

- 70% yes
- 30% no

One form qualified the no by saying "students are well served considering the number of district staff members who work in this area (1)." Another said: "we're beginning and our efforts vary considerably."

Setting (N=125). One-hundred and twenty-five persons at all levels answered this questionnaire.

Class size

- 82% 21-25
- 15% 26-30
- 2% 15-20
- 1% n/a

Number of classes in the building

- 35% 5-10
- 26% 16-20
- 25% 11-15
- 9% 21-25
- 6% 1-5

Grades in the building

- 35% k-6
- 20% k-5
- 10% k-4
- 10% 9-11
- 10% 3-6
- 3% 7/8
- 5% k-2

- 2X k
- 2X 1-6
- 2X 7-9
- 1X 1-4

Resources

- 86% library in school
- 39% library in town
- 38% museums
- 46% institutions of higher learning
- 77% music lessons available
 - 26% cost \$1-5
 - 19% cost \$6-10
 - 7% free
 - 48% n/a or don't know
- 32% community based opportunities including Adult Ed., 4-H, Scouts, CCD, dance, bookmobile, state part, ceramics, vocational school, hospital, dentist, local individuals, recreation center, senior seminar, summer sports
- 27% art lessons available
 - 9% cost \$1-5
 - others varied from free to \$6/one-half hour
- 15% theater
- 2% symphony

Words that apply to building concerning enrichment materials

- 36% could do better
- 31% readily available
- 24% inadequate
 - 9% numerous
 - 9% satisfactory
- 26% not available

Number of volumes of teacher materials

- 69% not available
- 8% 100-300
- 8% 1-6
- 7% 7-50
- 7% district resources

Number of volumes of student materials

- 76% not available
- 10% 1-75
- 5% 200-400
- 5% district resource center

Training to accompany materials

- 52% yes
- 30% no
- 27% no or ?
- 1% some
 - of the positive responses, answers included workshops, Title IV inservice, meetings, ECRI, ESS, ILA

Describe the program

- 28% teacher doing own thing
- 26% none as yet
- 13% inservice

- 10% enrichment materials
- 6% special teacher
- 6% whole class units
- less than 5% each--Title IV grant, writing program, audio-visual program, special program, Junior Great Books in Grade 2, stamp club, science fair, computer, productive thinking skills set, summer program, resource room

Percentage of time spent on program by:

Program Administrator:

No answer group totaled more than 5% with the exception of n/a at 82%

Principal

85% answered n/a

Curriculum director

97% answered n/a

Special Education Director

85% answered n/a

Classroom teacher

No answer was significant, with the largest group, 12% answering 10%

Did the school board have a role in developing policy?

--48% n/a

--35% no

--17% yes

Answers included: approved grant application, approved inservice, worked toward the program, oversaw grant application

The program is:

--48% n/a

--35% needs a lot of work

--17% successful

-- 4% not very successful

If successful, what makes it so?

--17% teacher enthusiasm

--15% materials

--12% coordinator

--15% students' effort

-- 8% administrative cooperation

-- 4% everyone's effort

--24% n/a or don't know

If unsuccessful, what makes it so?

--42% lack of time

--21% organization/coordination

--19% lack of staff, special teacher

implementation in classroom

--10% lack of identification

lack of materials

-- 6% curriculum center is too far structure

-- 1% or less indicated lack of commitment, lack of assistance, no room for projects, lack of motivation, training for teachers is lacking, effective methods, lack of administrative cooperation

Enrichment may be defined as a deliberate extension or elaboration of the core curriculum. For all of the students in your building, enrichment is:

- 57% encouraged
- 50% allowed
- 43% some teachers/not all use
- 28% not financially supported
- 23% difficult to provide
- 19% frequently available
- 15% few use
- 15% financially supported
- 7% easy to provide
- 2% discouraged
- 2% attempted

Child Variables (N=112).

Female (N=61)

Male (N=51)

Age

10 years N=24
 7 years N=22
 8 years N=14
 11 years N=12
 9 years N=10
 5 years N= 4
 6 years N= 4
 12 years N=10
 13 years N=14
 14 years N= 4

Identification measures

IQ

Group

-- n/a N=23
 -- yes N=82
 -- no N= 7

Individual

-- n/a N=28
 -- yes N=18
 -- no N=7

Creativity

Group

--n/a N=62
 -- yes N=44
 -- no N= 6

Individual

-- n/a N=76
 -- yes N=24
 -- no N=12

Achievement Test

Group

-- yes N=87
 -- n/a N=16
 -- no N=4

Individual

-- yes N= 8
 -- n/a N= 96
 -- no N= 5

Nominations

teacher N=97
 parent N=15
 peer N=61
 self N= 6
 other N= 4

Occupation of parent(s)

Father

n/a N=26
 teacher/principal N=15
 salesman N=6
 electrician N=6
 lawyer N=5
 doctor N=5

laborer	N=6
administrator	N=4
executive	N=4
farmer	N=3
fisherman	N=3
police/sheriff	N=3
buisnessman	N=3
accruntant	N=2
pilot	N=2
store owner	
military	
factory	
contractor	
clergy	
engineer	
foreign service	N=1 each
architect	
banker	
unemployed	
postal	
stockbroker	
fireman	

<u>Mother</u>	housewife	N=46
	n/a	N=20
	teacher	N=11
	nurse	N= 8
	secretary	N=12
	teacher aide	N= 5
	part time sales	N= 4
	consultant	
	store owner	
	operator	
	bookkeeper	N= 1 each
	librarian	
	artist	
	beutician	

Education of parent(s)Father

N=30	College degree
N=24	High School grad
N=8	Some college
N=24	Advanced degree
N=2	Some High School

Mother

N=42
N=20
N=22
N=8
N=4

Lives with:

Both parents	96
mom	7
n/a	3
mom & boyfriend	1
grandparents	1
father & grand- parents	1

Number of bilingual children = 2

Number receiving reduced lunch = 1

Number receiving free lunch = 3

Number of children in family

two	41
n/a	30
three	24
only	10
four	6
five	1

Position or birth order

oldest	42
youngest	36
n/a	17
middle	16
twin	1
only	1

Child's health

good	39
excellent	48
fair	4
very good	3
n/a	18

Child's self concept

good	64
excellent	22
very good	4
poor	6
n/a	18

Travel

outside of Maine	84
n/a	24
no	4

Child's characteristics

high ability	92
high intelligence	90
high potential	88
high creativity	72
high achievement	76
high task commitment	66
artistic	48
divergent	32
low motivation	16
culturally deprived	4
musically gifted	1
low creativity	1

Promising Practices

Several promising practices in the schools themselves were identified. More gifted students were studying and learning at appropriate ability levels than before. Funding has quadrupled over the past two years, the number of programs has more than doubled, and new legislation has been passed. In addition, some students were pursuing individual projects consistent with identified program goals. Where gifted students were being served effectively, it was usually due to an innovative and creative teacher/program facilitator who is devoted to the educational process for all students.

Problems

Problems have arisen during the first three years of implementation in the following areas: institutional preparation, lack of definition of gifted/talented consultant and classroom teacher roles; lack of data on effectiveness of alternative program models; problems of implementation in small rural areas; and funding. Some are just the problems that are common to small rural schools such as limited enrollments, geographic isolation and small budgets. Even though these problems greatly reduce program flexibility, they are "givens" and thus are not dealt with as "solvable" problems.

Lack of Institutional Preparation. To increase quality of services and eliminate confusion before starting to serve gifted children, a school system must prepare itself. Institutional preparation refers to the existence of a well developed need for change together with a positive attitude toward the concept of gifted education. There are two primary components involved in a lack of institutional preparation: 1) lack of support services; and 2) administrative inertia. Relative to the first component, the addition of a gifted program to a rural school district in which few or no other support services exist can lead to an extremely frustrating and self-defeating experience. Support services include libraries, museums, laboratories, field trips, art and music programs, etc. — services not readily available in many rural districts (see pp. 8-11). In regards to the second component, administrative inertia, systematic attempts to mobilize available expertise seem notably lacking in rural schools. Decisions regarding the educational placement of gifted children in programs are often made unilaterally by building principals or program consultants. This unilateral decision-making is often in a "collaborative guise" where classroom teachers are asked for nominations. However, the majority of the teachers surveyed felt they did not have an adequate role in determining who was admitted to the program (see

p. 6). In discussion with teachers, it was clear that many felt the "wrong" students were identified. On the whole, general administrators who made most of the placement decisions were found to have the lowest level of awareness among school personnel concerning gifted children (see p. 7).

Classroom teachers. The results of the survey seem to indicate that it is the classroom teacher who has to change the most. The adoption of a gifted program together with the implications of the "least restrictive environment" and tight budgets greatly increases the classroom teacher's responsibilities toward gifted children. Classroom teachers appear willing to work with gifted children but they lack the knowledge of methods and materials and technical competence necessary to work with them effectively. It seems ironic that in rural schools where voids of gifted services are extreme, that untrained and inexperienced teachers are suddenly asked to provide for gifted children. It must be noted that there is a marked shortage of trained teachers in the area of gifted (see pp. 3-7).

Lack of Data on Effectiveness of Program Models. A crucial problem in adopting a gifted program model is "what model is most productive for what district?" Very little research has dealt directly with this problem. Situational constraints, such as limited enrollments, tight budgets, and the commitment to mainstreaming have resulted in nine of the eleven choosing the "Enrichment Triad" model as the major means of trying to meet the needs of gifted children. This model is selected not by careful examination of alternative program models or even a look at the variables necessary for success, but because it is thought to be "easy to implement. Clearly the data supports the lack of institutional preparation in terms of enrichment opportunities and teacher training and even in the type of student identified.

Suggestions for Prevention

Institutional preparation might be viewed as the degree of understanding, support, and commitment that teachers and administrators give to a new program. Without this preparation, a gifted program cannot function effectively. Ideally, a system should be in an advanced state of readiness before adding a gifted program. A wise administrator might emphasize the need for such a program and prepare his/her staff six months or a year previous to implementation. Realistically, this is seldom the case, but it is becoming more of a reality

in Maine.

Inaccurate expectations and misidentification might be avoided by clear and definite public statements regarding each of these issues.

A "child study team" approach might better identify gifted children.

Inservice training is essential. It is a responsibility which must be shared by public schools, state departments of education, and teacher training institutions. Only with their mutual, intense efforts can those who are willing and available obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to function effectively.

Release time for planning and for conferences and training must be scheduled.

Identification procedures must reflect the "ethos" of the rural community and teachers must have a meaningful role in choosing gifted children to be served.

Finally, in considering any gifted program the following variables must be thought about: finances, size of school district, number of schools in the district, availability of space, location, management, visibility, transportation, acceptability, and curriculum.

Concluding Comments

The increasing adoption of gifted programs in Maine is an indication of schools' recognition of the need for gifted programs and/or their desire to provide them. Certainly the schools should not be faulted for such positive movement. The schools in the survey contain a mixture of promising practices and problems. These small schools are an American institution of the future as well as of the past and present and we must seek to solve the challenges of providing programs for all children including our gifted children.

What, then, is the small school district to do? Academic cooperatives could be established, districts could make greater use of technology, districts could jointly employ a transient gifted/talented expert, lead time should be allowed for program planning, the state department could disseminate relevant data regarding alternative models, release time for planning, training, visitations and conferences must be scheduled, local grants for MA-degree programs in gifted education should be offered to interested rural teachers, and the state reimbursement of local expenditures could be made less cumbersome.

It is not just facilities and equipment that make a great school, but

rather the teachers who staff that school and the administrators who make policies that govern the school. If teachers and administrators are the key to a successful program for gifted students, then the teacher trainer is the "locksmith" who shapes and molds the key. The teacher training programs must initiate change at all levels for all schools, teachers, and students, then our rural gifted will be appropriately served.